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At the first sound of hoofs upon the dry sod Amelia deserted the dishpan and stationed herself at the front door.

"Well, for the land's sake, what brings you here?" she cried as the horseman finally reined in near the porch and slid from his saddle.

Before venturing a reply the big stoop shouldered fellow cautiously surveyed the premises and indulged in an apologetic cough.

"Where's your pa?" he at last inquired, his uneasy eyes resting for a moment upon the plump little figure in the doorway.

"I reckon you're terrible anxious to see him," laughed Amelia, drying her moist hands in the folds of a blue gingham apron. "He ain't here, though—nor like, nor Jim, nor anybody—only me. It's too bad, Dave."

"Oh, I suppose it might be worse," said Dave as he proceeded leisurely to hitch his horse to a convenient post. Having accomplished this to his entire satisfaction, he grasped the porch rail and vanished over, alighting close to Amelia.

"Now, Dave, don't you dare!" she cried warningly, divining his intent and immediately seeking safety in flight.

But Dave started in pursuit, and, overtaking Amelia in the hall, he dared an energetic kiss on her sun-browned cheek.

"I think I hear pa comin'," giggled Amelia, and Dave started guiltily.

"Nothin' of the kind!" he exclaimed reproachfully. "Y'r just foolin' me." Nevertheless he hurried to the door, ready for instant flight.

"Don't see why you're so 'fraid of pa," she observed, leaning over the rail to pat the restive pony. "People say pa an me are as like as two peas."

"Didn't he ever tell you 'bout last election day down at Westcenter?"

"Not a word," was the untruthful reply.

"Well," began Dave, seating himself on the steps, "this county's the evenest one in the state, an' it's a mighty even state. So last year the committee happened along with some money an' says, 'Dave, put this here stuff where you think it'll do some good.' Well, 'lection day y'r pa drove into Westcenter an' hitched right in front of the polls. Then, quietlike, I made him an offer to put 'er in for Judkins."



"IT SURE IS MONEY."

"An then he said things?"

"Oh, I guess he did, an'—"

"An hit you a jolt between the eyes, an' you didn't come to till they had carried you into the drug store?"

"See here, 'Melia, I reckon you lied when you told me!"

"An when you come to pa says, 'If I ever catch you hangin' round my ranch again, I'll take a horsewhip to you!' Didn't he?"

"Yes, he did," acknowledged Dave with commendable candor. "An here I am a-hangin'."

"Yes," repeated Amelia, "here you are a-hangin'. What brought you away out here anyhow?"

"You," was the brief, but gallant response.

"Ah, go on!" retorted Amelia, with a derisive sniff.

There was silence for a moment, during which time Dave scraped the accumulation of dried mud from his boots with the blade of his knife and Amelia gazed out over the dead level prairie.

"Now, Dave," she said at last, "I know just as well as I'm standin' here that you've come for somethin' else."

out!" she declared in response to the incredulous exclamations of the men.

"Well, I swan!" muttered the old man, springing up with unusual alacrity and securing the dollar. "It sure is money," he added after a moment's careful scrutiny. "I reckon that's about the luckiest shot you ever made, stranger."

The stranger acknowledged the truth of the observation and reached for the little round piece. As the goldpiece passed from hand to hand various startling theories were advanced to explain the manner in which it had reached the crop of the sage hen; but, as it afterward transpired, they were all wide of the mark.

Meanwhile Amelia had turned her attention to the snipe and then to the second sage hen.

"Pa," she exclaimed, with a look of frightened amazement, "I do believe I can feel somethin' hard in this one!"

While the men crowded eagerly around the table Amelia proceeded with the dissection of the bird. Amid a profound silence she revealed its interior arrangements—and another gold dollar!

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"Lordy, Lordy!" quavered the old man excitedly.

"Why, pa," remonstrated Amelia, "that's swearin'!" And without waiting further words she attacked another of the sage hens.

"Blest if them ain't more comfortin' 'an Elijah's ravens," laughed Ike.

By the time the third and fourth sage hens had each produced one gold dollar the emotions of the Barnhills and their guest were too deep for words. They sat gazing at the remains and trying to think it all out.

At bedtime the old man lighted a candle and left the room.

"Well, I be durn!" he kept muttering to himself as he climbed the ladder which led up to the loft. "It's nothin' short of a miracle!"

The Barnhills were early risers, but before they opened their eyes the following morning the fortunate hunter had left for his day's sport.

"I don't know as anybody can blame him," growled Jim as he started on his round of morning chores; "only I'd like to take a few cracks at them gold lined birds too."

And it was in very much the same strain that the other members of the Barnhill family communed with themselves.

Late that night the hunter returned to the ranch. Drawing a chair up before the fire, he sat down and fell to studying his boots in moody silence.

"Didn't you hit nothin'?" queried Ike, though he could see the bulging game pockets.

Without replying directly the stranger drew out six large birds and laid them upon the table.

"Feel 'em," he suggested in a husky voice.

This time Amelia was assisted in her work by the old man and the two boys, and the kitchen soon bore the marks of the terrible carnage. There was little said, but they all worked with nervous energy, while great beads of perspiration stood out on the old man's forehead.

They thought themselves prepared for the result, yet with the disclosure of each successive gold dollar they cried out in amazement. The old man wiped his face on his sleeve and swore joyously, while Amelia was too much occupied to check him.

"Look here, stranger," he at last faltered as he dragged his guest out on the front porch. "I want to make you a proposition! Let's all blaze away tomorrow an' divide whatever we get!"

The stranger sighed heavily. "Oh, if I only could!" he lamented. "But you see tomorrow is election day, and I am under oath to appear in Westcenter."

The old man said nothing further, but the light of avarice burned in his faded eyes.

"Just like findin' money," he mused. "I'm right glad he's gone."

"Jim," whispered Ike when they were all in bed that night, "I reckon we're goin' to town tomorrow an' put in our first votes."

Jim chuckled.

"I reckon we're goin' to put some shot into them sage hens," he replied.

With the first tinge of dawn Jordan Barnhill and his two sons were gone from the ranch. Amelia preserved a discreet silence as she went about preparing the stranger's breakfast.

Later in the day the disappointed hunter gathered together his guns and dogs—and gold dollars—and departed for Westcenter.

"Shall I remember you to Dave?" he inquired as he bade Amelia goodbye.

"What do you know about Dave?" she demanded, with a sudden show of interest.

The stranger only shook his head and drove away.

Several weeks after the election Dave might have been seen approaching the Barnhill ranch with all the caution of an Indian scout in hostile country. Having convinced himself that there were no "men folks" about the place, he advanced to the front of the house and rapped.

"Well," said Amelia sharply, "do you want to die real sudden?"

"He ain't about, is he?" questioned Dave, with sudden trepidation.

"If you mean pa, he is flat on his back in bed. Blistered his feet huntin'."

Dave repressed a grin with difficulty.

"Heard about the 'lection?" he asked in a subdued voice.

"Yes. Pa said everything had gone to the devil."

"We only swung the state by two majority," chuckled Dave. "If y'r pa an the boys had voted, we'd have lost the whole thing."

Amelia's eyes grew big, and a cloud of suspicion slowly spread over her face.

"Dave Dietz," she cried with sudden anger, "who was that young fool that was shootin' out here?"

Dave hung his head and looked foolish.

"Who was he?" persisted Amelia.

"Well, since the 'lection he's been the new governor's son. Did you think he was good lookin'?"

Getting no response, Dave looked up and found Amelia in tears.

"Oh, we've been took in!" she sobbed. Then raising her voice she shouted, "Pa, pa, we've been took in, an' that young fool salted them birds just as sure as you're alive!"

From somewhere above there came a terrific explosion of profanity, and Dave made ready for flight.

"You'll be a dead man as soon as I tell pa that his party lost the state for want of three votes," declared Amelia. "An' I'm goin' to tell him right now."

With wonderful presence of mind Dave caught her in his arms and effectually silenced any further words.

"Don't say nothin'," he whispered. "I'm goin' to be made a deputy sheriff, an' then we can get married, even if the old man don't like me."

The Little Things Great Men Do.

I like to hear stories of the littleness of great men. I like to think that Shakespeare was fond of his glass. I even cling to the tale of that disgraceful final orgy with friend Ben Jonson. Possibly the story may not be true, but I hope it was. I like to think of him as poacher, as village ne'er do well, denounced by the local grammar school master, proached at by the local J. P. of the period.

I like to reflect that Cromwell had a wart on his nose. The thought makes me more contented with my own features. I like to think that he put sweeties upon the chairs, to see finely dressed ladies spoil their frocks; to tell myself that he roared with laughter at the silly jest, like any east end 'Arry with his bank holiday squirt of dirty water.

I like to read that Carlyle threw bacon at his wife and occasionally made himself highly ridiculous over small annoyances that would have been smiled at by a man of well balanced mind. I think of the 50 foolish things a week I do and say to myself, "I, too, am a literary man."—"Second Thoughts of an Idle Fellow," by Jerome K. Jerome.

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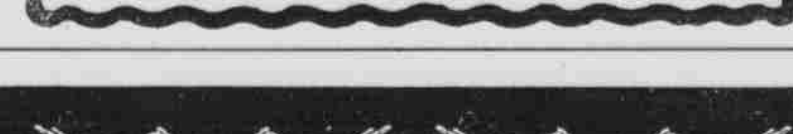
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